



DIRECTORATE OF  
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# *Central Intelligence Bulletin*

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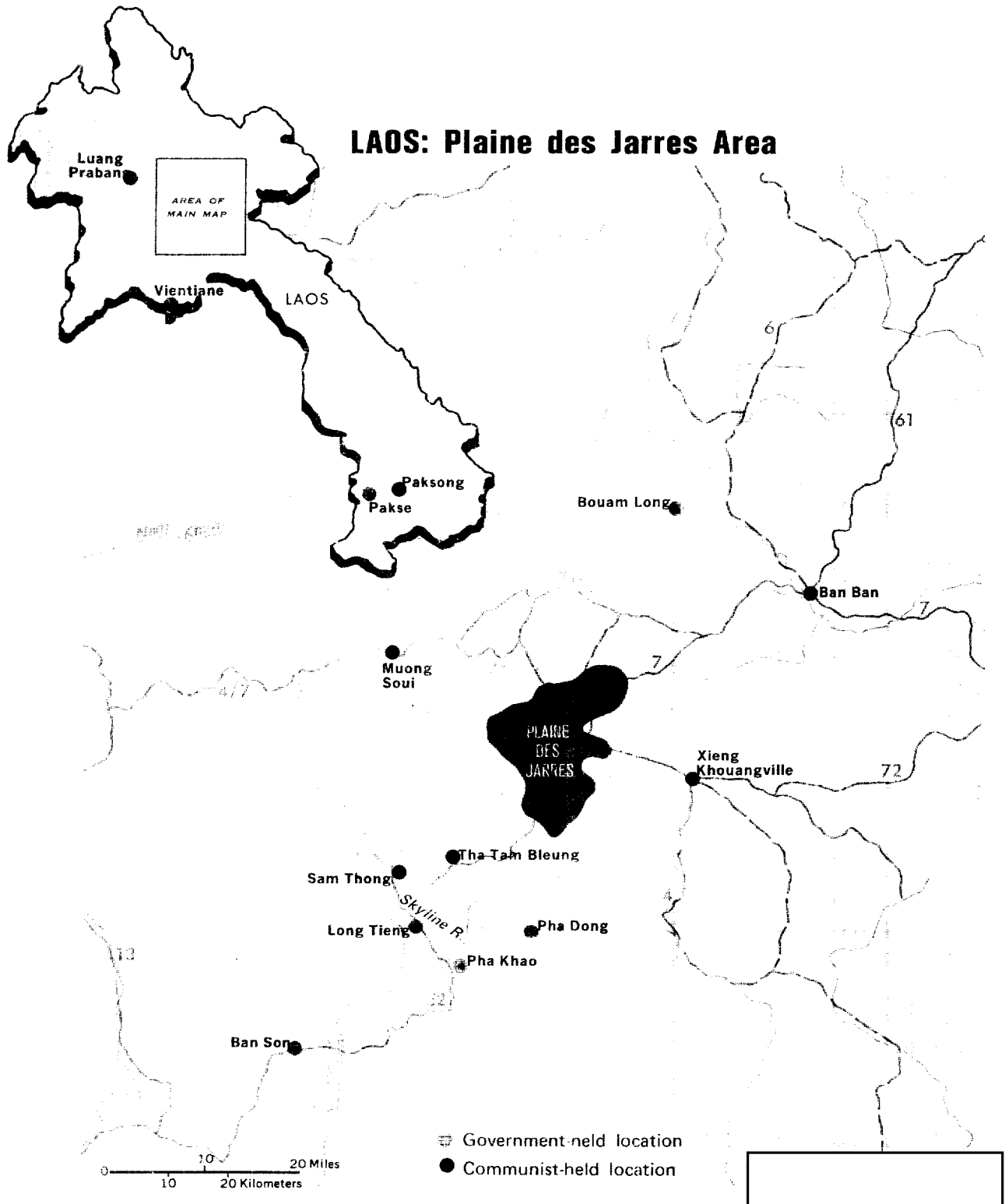
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LAOS: The anticipated Communist assault on Long Tieng is under way.

North Vietnamese infantry began hitting government defensive positions on Skyline Ridge overlooking the Long Tieng Valley on 18 March. Later on the same day, they attacked the remaining government outposts to the northwest of Long Tieng at Sam Thong. The Communists lost at least two tanks in these attacks, but succeeded in clearing the Sam Thong area.

On the morning of 19 March, heavy enemy ground assaults were reported along the length of Skyline Ridge. By mid-afternoon, two defensive positions had been lost and others were reporting hand-to-hand combat. Heavy artillery and mortar fire was being received throughout the Long Tieng complex. The government is using all available air support to stem the Communist drive.

It has been evident for several weeks that the North Vietnamese were preparing such an assault. Apparently their timetable was set back by logistics problems, aggravated by government air strikes and diversionary ground operations. If the Communists fail in this attempt to take the Long Tieng Valley, the current dry season may end before they can make another try.

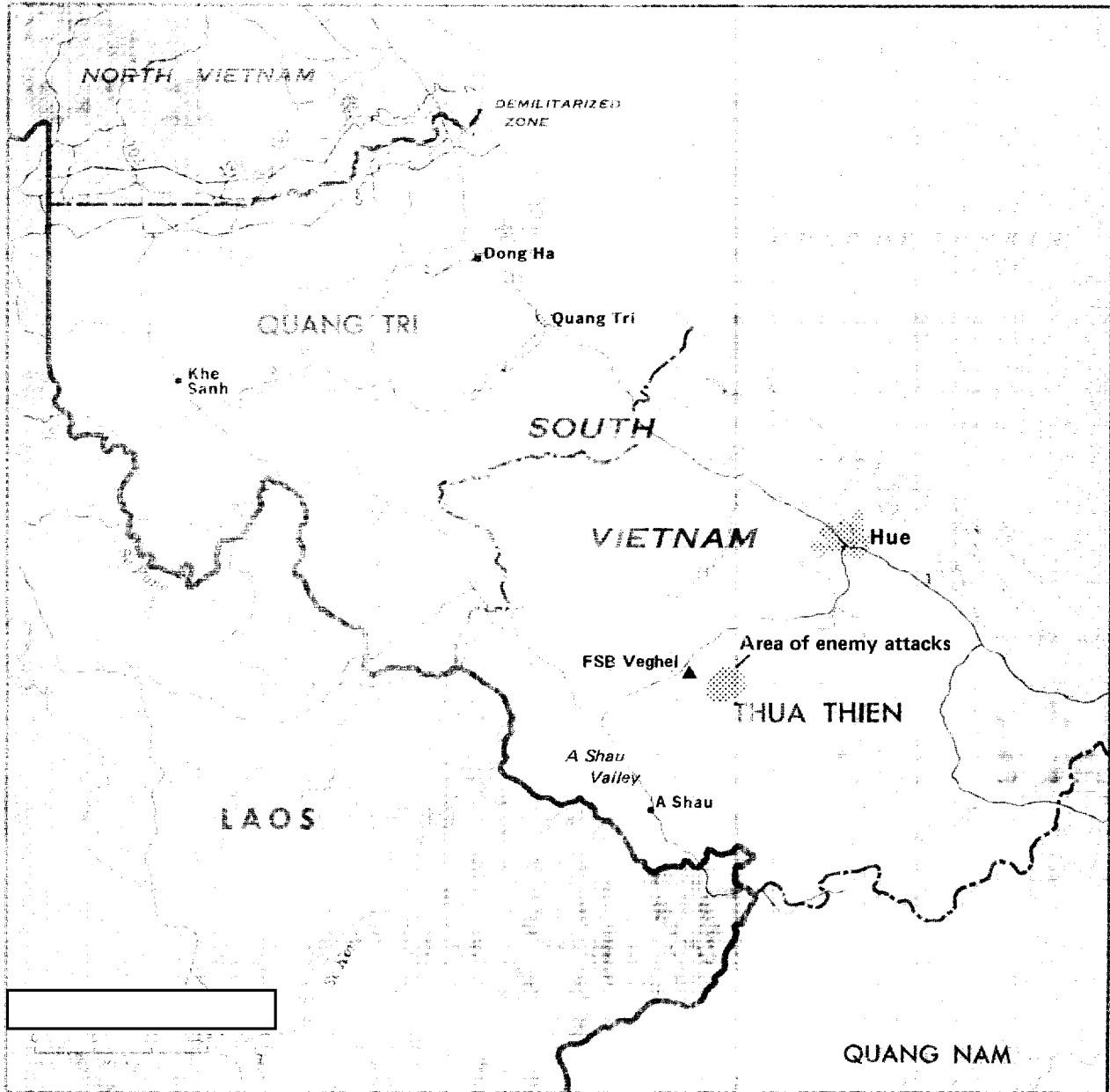
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SOUTH VIETNAM: Fighting picked up sharply in Thua Thien Province over the weekend as South Vietnamese units confronted Communist main forces in the foothills bordering the coastal lowlands.

An estimated two Communist battalions, supported by shellings totaling some 150 large-caliber rockets and over 1,000 rounds of mortar fire, attacked a South Vietnamese field position near Fire Support Base Veghel on 18 March. Several other ground attacks and shellings were also reported in the same area, following a number of smaller clashes last week. According to the South Vietnamese, Communist losses in the weekend action totaled about 280 killed and some 215 weapons lost; the South Vietnamese lost 27 killed and 83 wounded.

The enemy unit involved in these battles has been identified as the North Vietnamese 6th Regiment.

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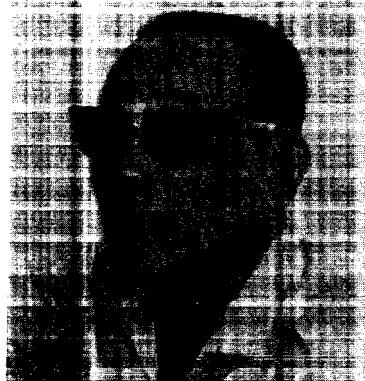
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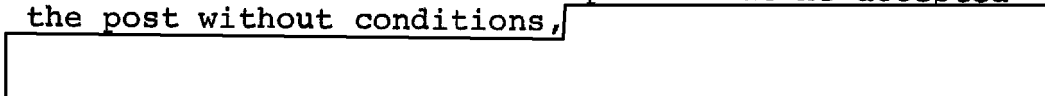
CAMBODIA: The appointment of Son Ngoc Thanh as prime minister should ease political tensions in Phnom Penh.

President Lon Nol turned to Thanh, who served as prime minister briefly in 1945, after five other candidates had turned the job down. The 63-year-old Thanh's anti-Sihanouk credentials and his reputation for honesty should mollify the restive students and others who have been agitating against royalist tendencies and corruption in the government. In addition, Thanh has few political enemies in Phnom Penh, and a number of influential politicians, especially former National Assemblymen, admire him. Although his support within the increasingly important military establishment is uncertain, he has close ties with the Khmer Krom, the army's elite fighting forces.



Son Ngoc Thanh

Lon Nol apparently intends to hold Thanh on a short leash. Thanh told the press that he accepted the post without conditions,



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The cabinet's makeup still has to be decided. There are persistent rumors that military officers will receive several of the key ministries and that there will be a number of civilian holdovers. Thanh's appointment may well preclude any important post for Sirik Matak, because the two men have been at odds for years.

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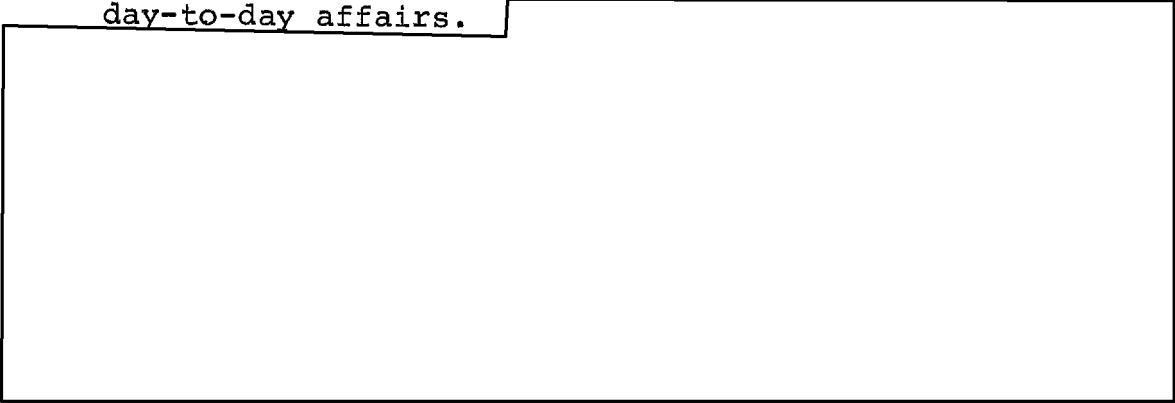
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Typically, many Cambodians are predicting a short life for the new government. The energetic Thanh, who is not close to Lon Nol, could soon become frustrated with the President's restraints and his constant interference in the government's day-to-day affairs.



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JORDAN - ARAB STATES: The public rejection of King Husayn's West Bank proposal by the governments of Egypt, Syria, and Libya, through the vehicle of the Confederation of the Arab Republics (CAR), concentrates on form rather than substance, criticizing the plan as a unilateral effort to solve a "pan-Arab" problem. This may indicate an underlying fear that Husayn has come up with a proposal that steals a march on the Palestinian resistance movement.

Egypt has long held that the Palestine question must be resolved by the Palestinians, and the CAR statement on Husayn's plan reflects this position. Opinion throughout much of the Arab world has contended that the proposal is the result of a secret Jordanian-Israeli agreement, despite the fact that Husayn intends the plan only in the context of an over-all settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and despite Israel's vigorous rejection of the plan. The CAR statement does not explicitly state this misgiving, but fear that such a secret agreement exists, or that the proposal provides the basis for a Jordanian-Israeli agreement, is implicit in the statement's insistence on the necessity for united, pan-Arab efforts to solve the Palestinian problem.

Vehemently negative statements from Palestinian resistance leaders also point to a fear that Husayn may have pulled the rug from under their own claims to be the sole spokesmen for the Palestinians' true aspirations. Fatah leader Yasir Arafat followed up Fatah and Palestine Liberation Organization rejections of the proposal with another denunciation on 18 March of the "liquidationist plan." The previous day, Fatah radiobroadcast the results of an emergency meeting of the Fatah central committee, which included a statement calling for the overthrow of

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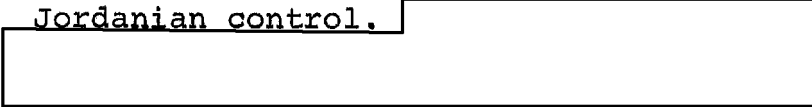
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Husayn and promising a "clear and detailed plan of action" at a Palestinian people's conference to be convened in Cairo in early April.

In Jordan, in the meantime, Husayn's plan has in general been greeted favorably, particularly by Jordanians but also by moderate Palestinians resident on the East Bank, many of whom see it as promising hope for a return home. Many Jordanians, including army officers, continue to believe that a deal has been worked out between Jordan and Israel, and they view this as not objectionable, so long as the West Bank and East Jerusalem are returned to Jordanian control.



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NOTES

COLOMBIA - ANDEAN GROUP: The Pastrana government's decision to seek congressional ratification of the Cartagena Agreement of 1969 could have serious repercussions for the Andean Group. The Colombian problem began late last year when the Supreme Court ruled that the government had acted unconstitutionally by implementing the Andean Foreign Investment Code without seeking congressional approval. Although the court has in effect upheld the constitutionality of the Cartagena Agreement itself by declaring that it has no jurisdiction over the validity of international treaties, the administration evidently concluded that only by first securing congressional ratification of the original treaty could it get a mandate for implementation decrees necessary for compliance with Andean Group policies. The treaty and the code will apparently remain in force for the time being, but there is considerable opposition to the code in the Colombian business community. The congressional fight over ratification of the treaty is expected to be long and bitter, and will be a setback to the Andean Group no matter what the final outcome.

SEYCHELLES ISLANDS: A bomb explosion on 17 March--the third within five weeks--has revived tensions in the capital just before the arrival of Queen Elizabeth today. The other two explosions on 14 February remain unsolved. The chief minister has blamed the opposition Seychelles Peoples United Party, which seeks immediate independence for these Indian Ocean islands containing 55,100 people. Security presumably will be tightened during the visit today, but the chance remains for further incidents during the visit.

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